

ON-FILE NSC RELEASE
INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

INFORMATION

19 December 1971

1:30 pm

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MEMORANDUM FOR:

DR. KISSINGER

FROM:

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE
RICHARD T. KENNEDY

SUBJECT:

Heavy North Vietnamese Attack on Irregular
Positions on the Plaine des Jarres

During the night of December 17-18 (Vientiane time) the North Vietnamese launched heavy, coordinated ground attack on all irregular units positioned in the northern and eastern Plaine des Jarres. Before daylight on December 18 the enemy had overrun or heavily engaged more than 13 irregular battalions, and units to the north and northeast of the Plaine were falling back in an orderly manner to regroup in the central section of the Plaine around the Xieng Khouang airfield. Muong Sui, west of the Plaine on Route 7, also fell to the North Vietnamese on the morning of December 19, Washington time. Phou Pha Sai, to the south of the Plaine and important to the defenses of Long Tieng, is currently occupied by the enemy.

To back up their attack the North Vietnamese have introduced at least five 130 mm. fieldpieces and 10-12 PT-76 tanks. The enemy artillery fire has been described as intense, and together with heavy mortar and recoilless rifle fire blocked resupply and medivac from the eastern part of the Plaine yesterday. The enemy has in addition introduced a large number of anti-aircraft weapons, which has hampered tacair support.


In response to the situation, Ambassador Godley has called for all additional air support available from both the USAF and RLAF, and for B-52 strikes. The RLAF has been very active. USAF efforts were hampered by adverse weather conditions and by diversion of resources to priority search and rescue missions following MIG attacks against USAF aircraft over eastern Laos. A B-52 strike was launched against the 130 mm. fieldpieces, but assessment of results is not yet available. We have a report, however, that at least one of the 130 mm. guns has been silenced. Total aircraft losses in north Laos now amount to four U.S. F-4s and two Laos T-28s.

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The most recent information indicates that the tactical situation improved somewhat on the night of December 18-19 Vientiane time. Irregular commanders are attempting to regroup their forces and to stabilize a defensive position running northwest-southwest across the Plaine.



It is clear that the enemy has begun a determined effort to sweep the friendly forces off the Plaine des Jarres as quickly as possible, with the probable intention of moving on then to attack the Long Tieng complex. Much depends on the state of morale of Vang Pao and his Meo troops, but so far there seems to be no problem. As of December 18 Washington time, Godley described the situation as serious but not critical, and there have been no subsequent developments to change this assessment.

It is clear, though, that the outcome will depend very heavily on the availability of air support. Both B-52s and light strikes and concentrated tacair support will be needed to blunt this NVA attack and give the friendly forces the cover to regroup and reestablish their defenses. CINPAC is providing all of the air support which Godley requests.

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